ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Lincoln Spring Creek Restoration

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in streams and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding to a project intending to improve habitat in a section of stream that has been negatively affected by past land use activities. The stream channel would be restored to a more natural configuration, wetlands would be developed , and vegetation would be added to improve the instream, riparian, and wetland functions of Lincoln Spring Creek and overall habitat for trout.

I. Location of Project:

The project site is located on Lincoln Spring Creek, a tributary to Keep Cool Creek and the Blackfoot River, within Township 14 North, Range 9 West, Section 23 in Lewis & Clark County (Attachment 1). It is just west of the town of Lincoln, adjacent to Highway 200.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species and to ensure angling opportunities whenever possible." By implementing habitat restoration projects through the FFIP, this critical goal can be achieved. This project would create additional habitat for species currently occupying Lincoln Spring Creek, including Westslope Cutthroat Trout. In addition to native trout, Brown Trout and Brook Trout occupy the project area and are important species for recreational angling.

III. Scope of the Project:

This project is located one mile west of Lincoln and builds upon a stream restoration project implemented in 2008, where 9,000 feet of channel were restored. In the project location, past land use activities degraded the channel and encouraged fine sediment deposition that has been detrimental to macroinvertebrate production and salmonid spawning. Cover and woody riparian habitat are also sparse. This project would restore 4,400 feet of Lincoln Spring Creek and 0.47

acres of emergent wetlands by restoring proper pattern, profile, and dimensions of the stream and improving sediment transport ability, installing root mimicry structures to provide refugia, cover, and stability, and narrowing the stream channel with finger bars (Attachment 2). The goal is to restore the instream, riparian, and wetland functions of Lincoln Spring Creek to improve rearing, spawning, and overall habitat for native and non-native trout.

The total estimated cost for this project is $90,910. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to $10,000. The remaining funds will come from other sources and from in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife		$22,500
Landowner	$11,250	$28,400
Westslope Chapter of Trout Unlimited	$5,000	$5,000
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited	$6,760	$2,000
TOTAL = $80,910		

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: Lincoln Spring Creek Restoration
Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division (FFIP)
Description of Project: The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding to a project intending to improve habitat in a section of stream that has been negatively affected by past land use activities. The stream channel would be restored to a more natural configuration, wetlands would be restored, and vegetation would be added to improve the instream, riparian, and wetland functions of Lincoln Spring Creek and overall habitat for trout.

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			X
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			X
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X

B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Potential Impacts on the Physical Environment.

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in Lincoln Spring Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality or their representative will be consulted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization).

5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

This project would restore the stream channel, riparian area, and floodplains, which will add quality vegetation to the site. Some vegetation would be disturbed during construction. However, the affected area would be revegetated appropriately using native materials. Long-term impacts are considered positive and would enhance natural riparian function.

7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats.

This project would restore the stream channel and floodplain to more natural and functional state. The improved stream, riparian, and wetland function created by this project will encourage healthy aquatic and terrestrial habitats that will have a net positive impact.

8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species.

This project will benefit Westslope Cutthroat Trout, which is recognized as Species of Concern in Montana and is Federally Sensitive. The impacts on this species due to this project are predicted to be positive, potentially increasing recruitment and survival.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

The channel restoration should increase stream connectivity by creating additional suitable habitat for fish species currently residing in Lincoln Spring Creek and the Blackfoot River drainage. Refugia, spawning habitat, and nursery habitat would be increased, which is considered a positive impact and is likely to increase the abundance of fish in the Blackfoot.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of this project and any potential concerns will be

addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, either the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the existing impaired section of Lincoln Spring Creek would remain untouched.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore a section of stream that has negatively affected by past land use practices. The stream channel would be restored to a more natural configuration, riparian vegetation would be added, and wetland habitat would be developed.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

Lewis & Clark Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their

approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: **www.fwp.mt.gov**.

5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 11:59 PM on February 4, 2018.

6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue, PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432, E-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ATTACHMENT 1

ATTACHMENT 2

Lincoln Spring Creek Restoration